

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 043

PS 014 544

AUTHOR Ross, Rhonda F.
 TITLE Segment Patterns and Their Relation to Transitional Activities.
 SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Child Health and Human Development (NIH), Bethesda, Md.
 PUB DATE Apr 84
 NOTE Sp.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (68th, New Orleans, LA, April 23-27, 1984).
 PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; *Class Organization; *Classroom Techniques; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Teachers; Intermediate Grades; Primary Education; *School Schedules; *Student Teachers; Teaching Methods
 IDENTIFIERS *Activity Segment; *Transitional Activities

ABSTRACT

In order to discover how teachers structure the school day, this study examined the relationship between the sequencing, number, and duration of Gump's (1969) "activity segments" and the transitions between them. Detailed notes were written by an observer in 96 hours of observations of four primary and four intermediate classrooms. The observer focused on the teacher or student teacher who was primarily involved in directing classroom operations. After the 32 classroom chronicles were collected, they were segmented according to Gump's procedures. Transitions between activities were coded depending on the number of old segments that were terminating (or continuing) and the number of new segments that were beginning at the start of a transition. Results indicated that only 19 of the 42 potential transition structures were used. While three transition structures were very common, there was considerable variation among teachers in the number of transition types used. This variation was related to whether a teacher or student teacher was directing activities and to the grade level of the students. (CB)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED248043

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

Segment Patterns and Their Relation to Transitional Activities

Rhonda P. Ross
University of Kansas

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Rhonda
Ross

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 014544

This research was supported by a predoctoral training grant from the
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

The findings of this research were presented at the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, La., April 1984.

Segment Patterns and Their Relation to Transitional Activities

One very demanding aspect of a teacher's job is deciding how to structure the school day. Teachers not only must decide how much time to devote to each content area and what kinds of activities to plan for students, but must also decide how many activities to schedule for a particular day, how long each activity should last, how to sequence the activities, and whether to schedule activities simultaneously or sequentially in time.

One consequence of having a sequence of activity segments operate throughout the day is that each time one segment ends and another is about to begin, some time needs to be spent by the teacher and students to dissolve the first setting and to create the next one. It is during this transitional time that materials get distributed or put away, pupils and teachers move to new locations, instructions for the upcoming task are given, and behavior orientations change.

At this time, we do not know how the complexity of a transition and its managerial demands affect its length. Structural variables such as the number and duration of segments that operate throughout the school day, the way the segments are sequenced, and the extent to which segments operate simultaneously could all affect the amount of time and effort devoted to transition activities by teachers and students.

While researchers have not examined the various structures of the school day or the effects of various structures, it is probable that as the segment structure increases in complexity, it becomes necessary for teachers to devote more time to managing segments and the transition phases between segments, thus taking away some of the time that would otherwise be available for academic instruction.

Although researchers have examined various components of the educational process, extremely limited attention has been focused on studying how teachers structure the school day and the effects of alternative structures. Only a handful of studies have examined the transitional phases between activities. One factor which has probably contributed to the lack of such research has been the unavailability of a system which could be used to describe activity and transitional structures. This paper will present one way in which the structure of the school day can be described and will use this system to describe how a small sample of elementary school teachers in a Midwest school district arranged activities in their classrooms.

Method

Research Settings

Four schools were involved in the study, with one primary class (i.e., grades 1-3) and one intermediate class (i.e., grades 4-6), participating from each school. Each of the eight classes had a student teacher assigned to it during the semester that the study took place. All four of these schools were within one school district. Demographic characteristics of students, student teachers, or cooperating teachers were not considered in the selection of classes to observe.

Observation Schedule

Each class was observed for four half days. Two of the four observation periods occurred in the morning and two in the afternoon. The order in which the morning and afternoon observations were made were counterbalanced across classrooms. Each of the half day sessions lasted for approximately 3 1/2 hours, although the exact duration of the sessions varied across classrooms as well as within classrooms on different days. In total, over 96 hours of observational data, sampled from all five days of the school week, were collected.

Data Collection and Preparation

There were three stages in the collection and preparation of data for this study: (1) recording of classroom operations through the use of classroom chronicles, (2) segmenting the classroom chronicles into environmental units, and (3) coding the transitions between units.

Recording classroom operations

Information regarding classroom operations were recorded by means of the classroom chronicle procedures outlined by Gump (1969). The classroom chronicle strives to be a permanent, narrative description of everyday behavior in school settings. Detailed notes were written by an observer who sat where she was able to observe and hear the teacher and the students. The focus of the observer's attention was on the teacher, student teacher, or on whoever was primarily involved in directing classroom operations.

To aid in the recording of the many events and messages common in the typical classroom, tape recordings were made of most sessions. Audio tape recordings were obtained by allowing a tape recorder to run in the classroom

during periods of observation.

When children were not in the room, the observer recorded any information written on the blackboards regarding assignments, and information about any learning centers that might be in the room (e.g., kind of center, materials, kind of activity located there, instructions for the activity, how work is handed in and evaluated).

Segmenting classroom operations

One important feature common to all ecological research methods is that instead of imposing arbitrary units of time when recording and analyzing events (e.g., 5 minute intervals), events are continuously recorded, and the natural boundaries of the events are identified and used in data analyses. The natural unit of classroom activity identified by Gump (1969) and used in the present study is called an activity segment. The use of segments makes it possible to describe classrooms in a manner that respects their structure and internal differentiation. When activity segments are identified, coded, and analyzed they provide a quantified picture of the classroom day.

Activity segments are a unit of activity similar to what teachers ordinarily call "lessons." However, activities that occur during the day that teachers would consider procedural activities instead of lessons (e.g., attendance and lunch counts, recess, snack time) would also be included as segments. In addition, some activities that teachers might consider to all be a part of one lesson could be identified as being separate segments (e.g., a teacher reading a story with a group of children in a reading circle would be a separate segment from the portion of time that students spent completing a language arts worksheet at their seats although both segments might comprise one lesson).

After the 32 classroom chronicles were collected, they were segmented according to the standard procedures outlined by Gump (1969). Although some segments included several distinct phases (e.g., Seatwork segments in which the teacher first explained what the class was assigned to do, followed by a period in which students individually completed their assignments, and ending with en masse grading of the assignment), only major segment changes (rather than phase changes) were marked for the purpose of this report.

Coding transitions

After classroom operations were recorded and segmented, a method of categorizing the various types of transitions between segments was developed. While transitions, like segments, have a variety of features that can be described, for the purpose of this paper, only the structural qualities of the transitions will be reported.

Transitions were coded depending on the number of old segments that were terminating (or continuing) and the number of new segments that were beginning at the start of a transition for any segment. This coding scheme was developed to focus on variations in how the school day was structured by teachers in terms of arranging the building blocks of the school day (i.e., activity segments) either sequentially in time (i.e., a new segment beginning only after the completion of an ongoing segment) versus various ways of combining two or more segments so that their operations overlapped partially or completely with one another.

Results and Discussion

Segment Structure

Segmentation of the classroom chronicles indicated that 320 different segments operated during the approximately 96 hours that the eight teachers were observed. One of the striking realities of classroom segments is that they do not always follow one another sequentially, but often teachers operate more than one segment simultaneously within the classroom. Indeed, teachers in this study sometimes had as many as four distinct activities occurring at the same time.

Transition Structure

With the simultaneous operation of a maximum of four activity segments, there was a logical possibility of 42 different transition structures. Examples of three contrasting ways to structure the transition of two simultaneously operating segments are: (1) both segments end at the same time and begin one new segment, (2) one segment ends and joins the on-going activity of the other segment, (3) one segment ends and begins a new activity segment, while the other segment continues.

In the sample of teachers observed, only 19 of the 42 potential transition structures were utilized. By far, the most commonly used transition type was the simplest, being the change from one solely-operating segment to a new solely-operating segment. Exactly half of all transitions were of this type. The next most common type of transition was one in which one of two simultaneously operating segments ended and children who had been involved in that segment simply joined the on-going activity of the other segment. The third most utilized transition type was similar in structure but had three simultaneously operating segments, rather than two, one of

which ended by integrating its members into one of the remaining on-going activities.

Teachers varied in the number of different types of transitions they used in their classrooms. One teacher had 17 different types of transitions in her classroom while another teacher who never had more than one segment operating simultaneously only encountered one type of transition which needed to be managed. A factor that was related to the variety of transitions encountered was the grade level of the students. Teachers of primary students had more variety within the structure of their day and thus had many different types of transitions while intermediate level teachers were both more similar to one another, and more internally consistent regarding how their segments and transitions were structured.

Using the system described in this paper it becomes apparent that even teachers working within the same relatively small school district vary in how they organize the school day, and in the types of transitions that they are called upon to manage. Further analyses are currently underway to describe further correlates of this variety in structure. In particular, we will be examining the kinds of activities and transitions that student teachers have the opportunity to manage during their training period. This interest is an outcome of our observations that although classroom teachers typically are responsible for managing many different types of activities and transitions, student teachers seem to be exposed to a much more limited distribution of activity and transition structures. The system described in this paper will be used to quantify this apparent difference in the management responsibilities of professional and student teachers.